

Senator Judith Zaffirini



Reports to the Families of District 21

Dear Friends:

The great lesson my mother and father gave me was almost invisible. It was a strong sense of being rooted. These meaningful words by Texas-born journalist Dan Rather capture the appreciation embraced by many of us fortunate to be rooted in our beloved Lone Star State. We value our strong sense of community, bountiful natural resources and spirit of possibility that make it a wonderful home for our families.

Senate District (SD) 21 is as diverse and expansive as Texas itself. We live on rural farms and in urban cities; work in oil and gas, manufacturing, agriculture and technology; and trace our histories to all parts of the world.

We agree, however, on the importance of quality educational opportunities for our children; investing in infrastructure and transportation; creating jobs and strengthening the economy; conserving our environment; and ensuring access to affordable health care—especially for the very young, the very old, persons with disabilities and veterans.

Families are the bedrock of our community and my inspiration never to miss a vote and to work day and night while collaborating with all my colleagues and constituents to address the challenges facing our state. As our district's population continues to grow, so should opportunities for our children and grandchildren to succeed.



FAMILY IS THE FOUNDATION of Senator Zaffirini's lifetime of service. She is motivated by her husband, Carlos Sr.; their son, Carlos Jr., and his wife, Audrey; and her darling grandsons, Asher Maxwell (5) and George William (3).

This newsletter serves as a nonpolitical reminder of my availability to serve you in the Texas Senate. That may mean researching and developing legislation, assisting with an issue involving a state agency or commission, honoring distinguished community members, sponsoring nominees to state boards or coordinating tours of the Capitol.

My staff and I pass bills big and small—if it matters to you, it matters to us. That's why I read and respond to every letter, email, social media comment and telephone call and maintain an open door policy. Your feed-

back and participation are critical to our shared success. Together, we can ensure that our state and our district foster growing, thriving families. I hope you respond to my call for ideas, action and collaboration, especially because some of my best legislation has been suggested by constituents.

My prayer is that the Lord will continue to bless us all with grace and good will, family and friendship, love and joy and health and happiness as we collaborate to forge a better world for future generations.

May God bless Texas!

Judith Zaffirini

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State Senator, District 21

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TRAVELING THE DISTRICT TO VISIT CONSTITUENTS is one of Senator Judith Zaffirini’s favorite activities. She learns by interacting with constituents such as (1) Freer City Clerk Angela Garcia and Council Member Martin Martinez and (2) Cotulla Main Street Assistant Coordinator Karina Saucedo and Deputy Manny Saucedo at the Liberty Cafe and the Cotulla-La Salle Airport ribbon cutting, respectively.

Redistricting Restores Historic Community of Interest

The redistricting plan passed by the 87th Texas Legislature substantially changes Senate District (SD) 21, represented by Senator Judith Zaffirini, D-Laredo. When new data are released by the U.S. Census Bureau every 10 years, the Legislature draws Texas Senate, Texas House of Representatives, Congressional and State Board of Education districts through a redistricting legislative process. Texas’ population increased by more than 4 million since 2010. Since 2012 SD 21 has included

18 counties—13 completely and 5 partially. After January, 2023, the district includes 16 by removing Atascosa, Bee and San Patricio counties and by adding Dimmit County. It also contains greater portions of southeast Travis County, including Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, and Hays County, including all of Kyle and San Marcos.

“I am honored to have served many longtime friends and constituents in SD 21,” Senator Zaffirini said. “Count on me to

continue to champion issues that benefit not only my constituents, but also Texans throughout the state.”

Dimmit County had been part of SD 21 for more than a century until it was drawn out in 2012. Returning it to the district reunites a historic community of interest with six other counties, namely, Duval, Jim Hogg, La Salle, Starr, Webb and Zapata, that have been together for more than 100 years.

SD 21 will stretch more than 360 miles from Travis County in the north to Starr County in the south, and more than 200 miles from the Rio Grande in the west to Caldwell County in the east—until the next redistricting cycle in 2031.

“I’m delighted to see these communities come together in the spirit of collaboration with a common purpose,” Senator Zaffirini said, “and look forward to working harder than ever on their behalf in the Texas Senate.”



LOCAL LEADERS work with Senator Judith Zaffirini to advance shared priorities. (1) She will miss many wonderful San Patricio constituents, including County Judge David Krebs, but looks forward to continued collaboration with (2) Lulu Flores and others in Travis County.

Senator Zaffirini Champions Education, Health Care Access

“Access to affordable education and health care are the most important factors for the next generation of Texans being healthy and successful,” Senator Judith Zaffirini said. “Though each year presents new challenges, we remain focused on securing these critical services.”

A former educator with 13 years of teaching experience, she understands the Legislature’s role in providing learning opportunities for students at every level. This includes increasing participation in early childhood education programs, supporting current and retired teachers and administrators and maintaining a standard of excellence for Texas colleges and universities.

“A quality early education leads to better outcomes throughout a student’s academic career and increases the likelihood that the student will be graduated from a higher learning institution,” Senator Zaffirini said.

Her higher education priorities include reducing the crushing burden of student loan debt, eliminating barriers to college and



STRONG EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP is the hallmark of (1) Rose Benavidez of Starr County, Chair of the Association of Community College Trustees, and (2) Les Dragon of Live Oak County, Three Rivers ISD Superintendent. They work tirelessly with Senator Judith Zaffirini to champion access to an excellent and affordable education at every level for Texas students.

modernizing financial aid. “Our institutions should empower our students not only to learn, but also to excel and to thrive,” she said.

Equally important is access to health care. Senator Zaffirini believes strongly that health care is a right that should be afforded to all, not a privilege reserved for the few.

“Expanding health care resources would allow more Texans to live longer, happier and healthier lives,” she said, “including persons in medically underserved areas in Senate District 21.”

Last session she filed Senate Bill 38, which would have expanded Medicaid and given coverage to 1.7 million uninsured Texans. It also would have drawn down more than \$15.3 billion in federal funding.

“Although it did not receive a hearing, my staff and I will file the bill anew for the 88th legislative session,” she said. “It’s the least we can do for our veterans, seniors, persons with disabilities, children and other uninsured persons who deserve basic access to medical care.”



SENATOR ZAFFIRINI RECEIVES VALUABLE LOCAL FEEDBACK from constituents, including (1) Philip Ruiz of Caldwell County; (2) Howard and Diane Berger (L) and County Clerk Eva Martinez of Wilson County; and (3) Rod Swan of Hays County.

Senator Zaffirini's Appointments

In the time between regular legislative sessions, Senate committees invite advocates, agency leaders, subject matter experts, and community members to testify at public hearings. Insight gathered is necessary to developing recommendations for the Legislature to address the next session.

Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick appointed Senator Judith Zaffirini during the 87th Legislative Interim to three special committees—the Texas Commission on Special Education Funding, the Special Senate Committee to Protect All Texans and the Joint Committee to Study Abandoned Oil and Gas Wells. She continues to serve on four Senate

standing committees—as Vice Chair of Natural Resources and Economic Development (NRED) and as a member of Higher Education, Local Government (LG), and State Affairs—as well as on the Texas Judicial Council and the Texas Access to Justice Commission.

Standing Committees

Senate Higher Education Committee members are reviewing the Permanent University Fund for The University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University, enrollment trends, faculty tenure policies, workforce training programs and U.S. history requirements. Only 20 percent of Senate District (SD) 21 residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, despite the availability of higher education institutions in the district, which limits their earning potential and future opportunities.

"I will continue to work tirelessly to increase accessibility, affordability and excellence in higher education to ensure more students in our district obtain degrees that enable them to enjoy a better quality of life and be more productive and successful," Senator Zaffirini said.

Representing the majority of the Eagle Ford Shale region, she is uniquely positioned to advocate in NRED for balancing industrial interests with responsible environmental stewardship. Committee members are evaluating economic development programs, hotel occupancy taxes, the state's natural gas storage capacity and wildfire control. The committee also will vet Sunset Advisory



PARTICIPATING IN COMMITTEE HEARINGS at the State Capitol with legislators. From Carrizo Springs ISD, Board Member Johnny Carrizo with Senator Judith Zaffirini outside the Senate chamber during the 87th Legislative Interim.



PASSIONATE ADVOCATES ENRICH OUR COMMUNITIES by continually striving for local and statewide progress. They include (1) Zachary Yanta, Texas Farm Bureau District 12 State Director, Karnes County; and (2) (L-R) Matias Arâmbula, Patty Raspino, Duane McCune, Glenda Henry and Monique Thelan of Guadalupe County.

Commission proposals for the operations of the Texas Environmental Quality

LG members are reviewing tax and appraisal reform in districts and extrajurisdictional audits, bond elections and lobbying by local

State Affairs is focused on administration and policy alternatives to abortion, public safety and permit strategies.

Interim Committee

Senator Zaffirini's appointments give her the ability to advocate for conservation in diverse areas and to have a positive impact. Because of her diverse experience, she is appointed to three s

Give Voice to SD 21 Constituents



Capitol is a great way for constituents to engage with their representatives. Senator Zaffirini (L-R) and Superintendent José Cervantes meet during a Committee to Protect All Texans hearing.

A lifelong champion of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, she looks forward to assessing the state of special education in Texas, identifying areas for improvement and recommending a new funding structure as a member of the Texas Commission on Special Education Funding.

In the Joint Interim Committee to Study Abandoned Oil and Gas Wells, Senator Zaffirini will use her environmental expertise to develop and implement a strategy to plug approximately 7,000 wells in the state. Unplugged and abandoned oil wells contami-

nate groundwater or leak greenhouse gases, posing serious public health and environmental threats, including in SD 21.

Senator Zaffirini also is part of the Senate Special Committee to Protect All Texans, which is studying school safety, social media, police training, firearm safety and mental health access. The committee was created after a shooter in Uvalde killed 19 students and two teachers at Robb Elementary School. “Because I used to represent Uvalde, represent Sutherland Springs and experienced the UT Tower sniper, I am committed to finding common-sense, bipartisan solutions to prevent mass shootings,” she said.

Judiciary-related Committees

As a member of the Texas Judicial Council and the Texas Access to Justice Commission, Senator Zaffirini helps develop legislation ensuring our court system is fair to all Texans.

During the 88th Legislative Session she will work with judges and lawyers to authorize remote hearings permanently, increase legal aid funding and enhance access to interpreters. “Every Texan should be treated equally in our courts regardless of income, ethnicity, gender or any other characteristic” she said. “I am especially grateful to Lt. Gov. Patrick for these important appointments.”

Constituents may participate in public hearings and submit opinions about these and other topics. For more information, please visit senate.texas.gov/committees.



LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIALS COLLABORATE CONTINUALLY with Senator Judith Zaffirini in developing legislation for their counties. (1) Bee County District Attorney José Aliseda and (2) Adela and Aaron Salazar, Jim Hogg County Justice of the Peace, Pct 4., provide valuable insight, feedback and expertise that address local issues in their counties.



THE GRAND RE-OPENING OF THE CREEDMOOR-MAHA WATER SUPPLY CORPORATION is a celebration of improved water quality and safety for customers in Travis County. Board Members (L-R) Ben Gray Sr, and Bobby Burkland; Matthew Pickle, General Manager; and Carl Urban, Board of Directors Vice President help Senator Zaffirini cut the ribbon to their new headquarters.

District Meetings Help Strengthen Community Ties



VIRTUAL AND IN-PERSON INTERACTIONS help Senator Judith Zaffirini connect with constituents, including (1) Jayne Varga of McMullen County and (2) Kristal Cantú of Zapata County.

The legislative interim offers many opportunities for Senator Judith Zaffirini to interact with the families of Senate District (SD) 21 in their home counties.

“Constituent meetings are as engaging as they are informative,” she said. “I hear firsthand accounts of issues throughout the district, connect persons to resources, collaborate regarding-potential legislation and more.”

She also gladly meets with Gov. Greg Abbott’s nominees for state boards. “It always is exciting when someone from our district serves at the state level,” she said. “After checking references I meet with every nominee to confirm his or her character, judgment and ability to serve and to discuss our shared priorities for SD 21. I am delighted to sponsor qualified nominees

for confirmation by the Texas Senate. This initial meeting often sets the groundwork for a productive working relationship for years to come.”

Attending festivals, parades and myriad events also provides for a rich variety of venues at which Senator Zaffirini can visit her vibrant district and observe local traditions.

Senator Zaffirini and her staff prioritize responding to and meeting with every constituent who requests an appointment, including virtually via Zoom. This practice enables them to remain responsive, effective and engaged. “This is a mutually beneficial experience,” she said. “I truly encourage anyone who encounters an issue to contact my staff and me for assistance. Our plates are never too full.”

Senator Zaffirini Prioritizes Constituent Services

“*Serviam* (I shall serve.) is our mantra,” Senator Judith Zaffirini says often. “It’s a lesson learned from the Ursuline nuns that reflects our readiness to respond to constituents.” Perhaps the most common way we assist is by guiding them through issues with state agencies. We do our best to expedite these processes and refer persons to appropriate resources.”

In April, 2022, for example, two healthcare providers from Laredo—Gerardo Vargas, owner of South Texas Medical Equipment and Supplies, and Joel Hernandez Jr., owner of Primary Health Source—had technical difficulties revalidating their Medicaid Provider Enrollment statuses.

Without it, these healthcare providers couldn’t help their medically underserved communities. Thankfully, they secured application extensions when Senator Zaffirini and her staff contacted the Health and Human Services Commission.

“It’s important to follow-up with constituents like Mr. Vargas and Mr. Hernandez to ensure their issues are resolved in the short-and long-term,” Senator Zaffirini said.

The senator’s expertise also extends to other agencies, including the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (THDCA).

In September, 2021, Alonso Ramos contacted Senator Zaffirini’s staff for assistance when he learned he could face eviction. She and her staff requested TDHCA expedite Mr. Ramos’ application, and he was approved.

Several months later, in June, 2022, Mr. Ramos missed the deadline to renew his Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. “Because Senator Zaffirini and her staff were so effective in processing my application, I knew they also could assist me with my SNAP benefits, too,” Mr. Ramos said.

“We want to make it as easy as possible for Texans to use state-funded social programs,” Senator Zaffirini said, “and are delighted to facilitate their interactions.”

What’s more, these constituent cases often inspire legislation, as was the case when the pandemic forced many Texans to file for unemployment benefits with the Texas Workforce

Commission. Senator Zaffirini passed three bills to improve the agency’s operations.

Constituents are welcome to call Senator Zaffirini’s Capitol office in Austin via 512/463-0121 and her district office in Laredo via 956/722-2293 or email her via judith.zaffirini@senate.texas.gov.



THE SAFETY OF LITTLE TEXANS is a top priority. Senator Judith Zaffirini thanks (1) Chief of Police Marco Peña of the Elmendorf Police Department for his service; and (2) Monica and Gonzalo Serrano Jr., her former Capitol staff member, for naming Baby Judith in her honor.

We’re here to help you and your families. Please contact us if we can be of assistance.

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DIAL 711 FOR RELAY CALLS



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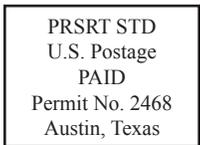
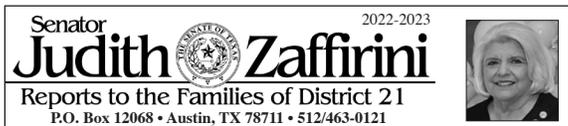
Senator Zaffirini Honored for Legislative Excellence

A tireless advocate for Texas families, Senator Judith Zaffirini is the second highest-ranking senator and the highest-ranking woman and Hispanic senator. Her work ethic is reflected not only in her 100 percent career-long voting record, having cast 67,923 consecutive votes, but also in receiving more than 1,100 honors for her legislative, public

service and professional work. Of these, more than 500 are in communication, including 45 from the Press Women of Texas' 2021 Professional Communication contest. She "swept" five categories, earning first, second and third place prizes for her speeches, press releases, advertisements, crisis communication campaigns and page designs. First-place entries advanced to the National

Federation of Press Women's competition, in which Senator Zaffirini won five third place awards and four honorable mentions.

What's more, the Texas Press Association named her a Champion of Transparency for her leadership in promoting open government, including by filing eight priority bills in 2021. "Transparency and accountability are essential



for democratic governance," said Senator Zaffirini, a communication specialist with B.S., M.A. and PhD degrees from The University of Texas at Austin.

Because these standards also apply to the judiciary, she passed legislation requiring the rotation and reporting of court appointments; enacting reforms to the State Commission on Judicial Conduct; and promoting judicial efficiency, transparency and excellence. In



FAMILY FIRST! What Senator Judith Zaffirini wishes and hopes for her beloved grandsons George (L) and Asher (R) is what she wishes and hopes for all children in SD 21.

2021 the Judicial Section of the Texas Bar Association named her

"Friend of the Judiciary," and in 2022 she received the Liberty Bell Award, which is bestowed upon the non-lawyer who made the greatest impact on the law, from the Laredo-Webb County Bar Association.

She is inspired by her family—her husband of 57 years, Carlos Sr.; their son, Carlos Jr., and his wife, Audrey; and her two darling grandsons, Asher Maxwell (5) and George William (3).